

An effective public works manager... develops staff

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Note: *The APWA Leadership and Management Committee has developed a set of core competencies for public works managers. The series of articles in the APWA Reporter based on these competencies—entitled “The Baker’s Menu”—is designed to help public works professionals recognize and develop managerial talent. Included in this issue is the eighth in the series of competencies recommended by the committee. For more information please contact Ann Daniels, APWA Director of Technical Services, at (800) 848-APWA or at adaniels@apwa.net.*

How can you tell if your organization does a good job of developing staff? Answer the following questions:

1. How much do you invest in training?
 - a. Technical
 - b. Safety
 - c. Career Development
 - d. Leadership
2. How many of your key positions—department heads, division managers, and supervisors—are promoted from within?

If you spend time and money on training and you are able to promote a number of your key positions from within, then you are doing a good job of developing staff. I recently heard Stephen Covey speak at a conference and he discussed the value of people in an organization. He said how ironic it is that buying a machine is considered an asset, while sending a person to a leadership seminar is considered an expense. To me there is no greater asset than a well-trained employee.

Unfortunately, when it's time to trim the budget, what's the first thing to get cut? Yes, travel and training. The argument I hear over and over again is that we can't afford all this training—when does the work get done? That's a cop-out. It's an excuse not to do training. Sometimes it is based on fear; fear that if someone knows more than me, then they'll take my job or get the credit and I won't. That's the very point. We should be doing all we can to develop others, so that when the time comes for us to retire or take another job then we have capable successors ready to move up. Ronald Reagan once said, “...there is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit.”

Before you can develop your staff you have to back up a step and look at the hiring process that brought them to

you in the first place. What criteria did you use? Did you focus on the narrow job description and hire someone solely based on their technical ability to perform certain tasks? If so, then you may have overlooked something more important, the person's potential to move up through the organization, their ability to learn and grasp new concepts, and their ability to get along and develop strong relationships with other team members and the public you serve. The one tendency we need to run away from is the rush to fill open positions with “warm bodies” because we need the people to get the work done. Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, says that people are not an organization's greatest asset, *the right people are*.

So, when in doubt, don't hire—keep looking. Even if you weren't involved in the hiring process that brought you most of your staff, you still need to evaluate whether they belong “on the bus” and if they are in the right seat. Sometimes it's a matter of changing their jobs or responsibilities. Sometimes, they are no longer productive and need to move on. You will find through experience that it is nearly impossible to turn a “C” performer into an “A” performer. That's why it is critical to spend a significant amount of your time managing the people process so you invest your valuable training time and dollars in things that will bring return to the organization.

Developing staff is done in many ways. We use terms like succession planning, leadership development, public works academy and career development, and those are just a few I'm familiar with. The purpose of all of these is to take an already motivated employee and help them develop skills they need to succeed now and prepare them for future opportunities. I once had a supervisor tell me he was disappointed that he lost two of his crew members because they got promoted and were then reassigned to a new crew. I told him he should be proud of that, as he must be doing something right if half his crew got promoted.

One of the more effective ways you can develop your line workers and supervisory group is to have them participate in professional organizations and attend conferences and training put on by those organizations. Not all of these opportunities cost a lot of money or time. For example, APWA sponsors Click, Listen & Learn sessions that can be viewed at your workplace. APWA conferences held at the national and chapter levels provide great opportunities for network-

ing and allow you to see the latest in equipment and technology while you attend learning sessions that will help you in your workplace. Your Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP/T2) provides regular training for transportation professionals and they offer videos and a library of information for you to use to bring additional training to your site. Other professional organizations associated with the whole realm of public works functions offer similar opportunities.

We've all read stories and seen the statistics about the aging workforce. It is a reality in my city and probably in your organization as well. Some figures show that up to 50% of the senior managers in government are due to retire within 3-5 years. If you are investing in the development of staff now, when key positions turn over the organization will be in a better position to have qualified personnel available to compete for the openings and be promoted from within. Without a process, you will have vacancies in high-demand positions where the supply of qualified personnel is low. I've seen key positions stay open for over two years. That is not good for the organization, the customers, or the employee group affected by this lack of a key leader and manager.

In Gillette, WY, we have recently implemented a Leadership Development Program for City employees. We chose to make this investment in senior management time, employee time, and money for a number of reasons. First, we want to address the reality of the aging workforce and begin now to train for the future. Second, employees who understand how they fit into the big picture of City government will be more effective because they understand how their performance contributes to the fulfillment of the City's strategic plan. Third, we want employees to know what is expected of a manager in our organization. Fourth, and maybe most important to the employee, they will gain new skills so they can successfully compete for future leadership positions. We're doing this with a combination of in-house workshops, skill assessments, and classes at the local community college. We're requiring the reading of two books that will be discussed at luncheon meetings. They are *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, and *Execution* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan. We're also offering the Franklin-Covey *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* training as an integral part of the program.

A way to tell how successful you have been and whether you have done a good job of developing staff is whether you can say a year after you leave that you're proud to have worked in that organization. If you leave and it all falls apart, that doesn't mean you were all that valuable to the organization. It just means you didn't do a good job of developing your staff. The true test of a good manager is whether the organization continues to succeed *after* you leave. Your legacy is the people you have trained, developed and (hopefully) promoted. You will also find that training is a great retention tool. When you look beyond salary, your staff desires meaningful work, a chance to make a difference, and recognition for a job well done. When there is no training and no opportunity for advancement, your best people will leave.

In conclusion, this is your chance to get involved and help the Leadership and Management Committee, as we prepare for a session at Congress in 2006 entitled "Planning for the Future: Career Development and Succession Planning." If you have a leadership development program, a public works academy or a method of succession planning in your organization, please share it. We'll reference some of these success stories so others who wish to invest in planning for the future can do so without having to reinvent the wheel. I call it the APWA version of R&D, "Ripoff & Duplicate."

Remember one more thing: Your highest calling is growing and developing your people. John Maxwell says it well, "Your people won't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

"Leadership is helping other people grow and succeed. Leadership is not just about you. It's about them." – **Jack Welch**

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership." – **John Maxwell**

"Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves." – **Stephen R. Covey**

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CORE COMPETENCIES at a GLANCE

- Encourages Team Building
- Involves Others
- Possesses Oral/Written Skills
- Builds Trust/Respect
- Prioritizes
- Sets Realistic Goals
- Helps Others to Succeed
- Resolves Conflict
- Manages Time
- Manages Workload
- **Develops Staff**
- Anticipates Future Needs
- Is Flexible